

Interpersonal Leadership

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It could be argued that interpersonal intelligence and leadership are in such a symbiotic relationship that they are actually tautological. One way of defining leadership is to postulate what it is not; it is clearly not management. Management might be seen as the technical aspects of a task or role which can be completed without reference to other people. For example, it would be possible to complete a school development plan, a timetable or review the teaching of a colleague in a technically efficient way. However, for each to become effective active engagement with people is required. A key transitional phase in the movement from management to leadership is the recognition of the 'rationalistic fallacy', understanding that rational structures and systems do not necessarily secure engagement and commitment.

Leadership, by contrast, is increasingly understood as being concerned with 'higher order' activity. In essence the purpose of the organisation, the values it will work by and the capacity of individuals to contribute to it. Reference is often made to leadership being on the high ground – in fact this is an illusion. In reality leadership is in the swamp dealing with the uncertain, the ambiguous and the problematic. The nature of the school in the future, the confidence that it translates its moral principles into the actual experience of every child and the belief that it is becoming an organisation in which all are learning require engagement with people – not the ability to create structures and administer systems.

If leadership is seen as moving people from compliance to commitment, from acceptance to active engagement and from task completion to professional involvement then, interpersonal intelligence is the vital medium. It is impossible to conceptualise any model of leadership that does not have interpersonal intelligence as a key component.

Schools are profoundly complex organisations – and becoming more so. The demands on schools and the dynamically changing environment in which they have to operate reinforces the importance of relationship-based leadership. If the world were linear, predictable and controllable then leading organisations would be relatively simple. However, the world is complex, dynamic and driven by unpredictable relationships. Such a context generates fear and excitement, anger and hope, stress and fulfilment, engagement and rejection; in other words emotional responses. At the heart of our understanding of leadership has to be the fundamental proposition that every leadership action will generate emotional responses. The problem is that the same action may well generate contradictory responses within an apparently homogenous group. An early lesson of leadership development is that the responses of individuals are expressed through behaviour which is derived from subjective perceptions – which are, by definition, private and unknowable.

For all of these reasons it is argued that central to any definitions of leadership is the concept of interpersonal intelligence. However this assertion begs three fundamental questions:

1. What is interpersonal intelligence and how can we recognise it?
2. Why is interpersonal intelligence important in educational leadership?
3. How can we develop and sustain interpersonal intelligence?

1. What is interpersonal intelligence?

There are numerous models and permutations of definitions available around the concepts of emotional intelligence, interpersonal intelligence etc. Two of the most widely known are Goleman (1998) and Stein and Book (2000). Their respective models can be summarised thus:

GOLEMAN
Self-awareness
Self-resolution
Motivation
Empathy
Social Skills

STEIN and BOOK
Intrapersonal
Interpersonal
Adaptability
Stress Management
General Mood

What these models have in common is the stress on two dimensions – the internal and the external; understanding of self and the capacity to engage with others. At this stage it might be appropriate to offer an attempt at a synthesising definition:

Interpersonal intelligence is the authentic range of intuitive behaviours, derived from sophisticated self-awareness, which facilitate effective engagement with others.

The specific behaviours might include:

- the ability to respond with empathy
- elucidating the motivation of others
- effective listening, questioning, synthesising and explaining
- emotional self-management, understanding one's responses
- the ability to engage with others, to show genuineness and regard.

Central to this model is the notion of authenticity; in other words these are not skills to be acquired, they are behaviours which are rooted in the essential integrity of the individual. Singer (1997) provides a powerful reinforcement of this:

So maybe Aristotle was right: the more we practise virtue, for whatever reason, the more likely we are to become virtuous in an inner sense as well (p 200).

This quotation establishes an important link that will be returned to – Interpersonal Intelligence is a moral issue as much as a means of efficient communication. The behaviours can be viewed as a pragmatic toolkit but, in reality, they are manifestations of a moral perspective. Hence the stress on the importance of authenticity – social behaviour as the genuine manifestation of a coherent personal philosophy.

Interpersonal intelligence is essentially about being human – it is the most direct and public demonstration of values in action. Gardner (1995) expresses it thus:

I have in mind here individuals who are exquisitely sensitive to the needs and interests of others, and/or individuals who are correlatively sensitive to their own personal configuration of talents, needs, aspirations and fears. (p 31)

The inscription on the temple of Apollo at Delphi 'know thyself', might be extended to 'know thyself, know others, then act'.

2. Why is Interpersonal Intelligence important in educational leadership?

The answer to this question rests in our understanding of the nature of education and the nature of leadership. In essence it is possible to argue that what is now described as interpersonal intelligence has always been understood as one of the central characteristics of the educated person. The ability to understand self and to make conscious decisions about one's responses to others would be seen by many as essential outcomes of an educational process. The direct relevance of interpersonal intelligence to educational leadership would therefore appear to have a number of manifestations.

First and foremost is the notion of the leader as exemplar, as a model of appropriate behaviour. The natural reticence and shyness of many senior staff in schools leads them to underestimate the importance of their behaviour both as a model and as a sanction i.e. implicitly condoning certain patterns of behaviour. If a school's values talk about notions of 'respect' 'community' etc then there has to be appropriate behaviour. There is therefore a moral imperative on school leaders to adopt a model of personal effectiveness which exemplifies the values of the school.

The second factor is both principled and pragmatic. Decision-making, even in a close relationship, is a problematic and complex process. In a school, with an almost infinite number of social permutations, it is especially difficult. It therefore behoves leaders to work to create a culture, 'the way we do things round here', which optimises effective collaboration and enhances interpersonal relationships. Again this is functional, it leads to better decisions, and it embodies principle in practice. The next justification lies less in theory and more in emerging knowledge. Our understanding of neurological functioning points increasingly to the fact that learning is an emotionally based activity. Effective

brain functioning is dependent on a positive emotional environment. Anger, stress and tension will actively block appropriate brain functioning; a positive and relaxed climate will enhance the potential to learn. This applies to adults as much as it does to children. In all of the debate surrounding the concept of the learning organisation (and whether schools can ever achieve that status) the importance of the emotional climate is often overlooked. This is much more than the absence of tension, it is the creation of positive self and mutual regard.

The final point focuses on educational leaders themselves. The discussion so far has tended to focus on the social environment. However, it is important to stress that the mental landscape of the individual is at least as important as the public arena. The definition of interpersonal intelligence offered above stressed that it starts with personal awareness and understanding and this dimension of leadership is often neglected. Leadership effectiveness is a product of personal effectiveness, which is in turn grounded in emotional self-awareness and interpersonal intelligence. What makes leadership distinctive is the high level of sustained and significant engagement with others. In the course of a day this can involve the extremes of anger and despair, joy and celebration. It is worth reflecting on the number of transactions leaders have each day, each of them rich in potential, each of them a 'moment of truth' and everyone of them based in perception rather than logic and rationality – or at least in competing rationalities. The level of demand and impact will, of course, vary over time and context but this aspect of the job of the leader explains why it is both so demanding and challenging and so rich and rewarding.

3. How can we develop and sustain interpersonal intelligence?

Interpersonal intelligence can not be taught. It is not developed through one-off events and by definition does not lend itself to distance or virtual education. In essence it is about enhancing a person's human capacity. It might be helpful to think of this capacity as a reservoir, each day it is drawn on, and on many days it is replenished. However, there will be times when the demand is so high that levels get dangerously low – with potentially dangerous consequences. Leadership development has to focus on strategies to refill the reservoir and to keep it in a state of equilibrium.

In this context it might be helpful to think about the type of learning that is appropriate.

The model below proposes three modes of learning; each is valid but serves a different purpose and leads to a very different level of potential engagement. Shallow learning is fragile, short-term and is unlikely to have a significant impact on behaviour. The crucial thing about deep learning is that it leads to understanding – public information becomes personal knowledge.

<u>SHALLOW</u>	<u>DEEP</u>	<u>PROFOUND</u>
Information	Knowledge	Wisdom
Replication	Understanding	Meaning
Memorisation	Reflection	Intuition
Extrinsic	Intrinsic	Moral

Interpersonal intelligence requires profound learning which is concerned with the creation of personal wisdom and meaning, the development of the capacity to act intuitively and a recognition that the motivation to learn in this way has to be moral.

Profound learning is therefore rooted in personal change and growth, it is about the development of personal models, or mind maps, which both inform and interpret behaviour. The learning strategies associated with this approach might include:

1. Systematic and structured reflection.
2. Coaching, mentoring and critical friendship.
3. Focused review and feedback
4. Theory building and testing
5. Team based learning
6. The creation of a learning community.

However these suggestions only have validity if there is a predisposition to learn. Thus we have to include in any definition of leadership effectiveness a willingness to learn and an understanding of how that learning takes place. As Fullan (2001) expresses it:

If you want to develop leadership, you should focus on reciprocity, the mutual obligation and value of sharing knowledge among organisational members. The key to developing leadership is to develop knowledge and share it (p 132)

The basis of leadership is reciprocity and sharing, which are also the basis of leadership development and they are also the simplest definition of interpersonal intelligence.

References and further reading:

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